

BSBI eNews – March 2017

From Jim McIntosh, Senior Country Officer, jim.mcintosh@bsbi.org

(Guest Editor for March: Polly Spencer-Vellacott, Welsh Officer, polly.spencer-vellacott@bsbi.org)

Recorder Names

With the huge number of records being added to the database every year it is important to make sure the recorder (and determiner) names you use are as consistent and distinct and as possible, to avoid any confusion. For example, if there are multiple versions (however subtle) of the same recorder name, it can make searches incomplete or, at least, more tricky. As an example - Maria Long, Maria P. Long, Maria P Long, Long M. and Long MP are all different people as far as a computer is concerned! There are probably more than half a dozen different versions of your name in the BSBI DDb or in MapMate - have a look!

We used to recommend that surnames were followed by initials in line with BRC guidance (e.g. Long, M.P.). However, due to a proliferation of similar names, we now recommend that all new names are entered as forename, middle name (or middle initial) and surname. (e.g. Maria P. Long).

However, there is a lot to be said for using the same approach consistently. So, if you have been using the “Surname, initials” format for years, you may wish to continue with that format – even for ‘new’ names. But please do make sure that whenever you enter a new recorder name for the first time, you spell it correctly, use ALL the recorder’s initials and get all the full-stops, spaces and commas in the right place and right order! (e.g. McIntosh, J.W.). And always use precisely the same recorder name spelling and format every time you subsequently enter records by them.

Whilst it is generally not worth making wholesale changes retrospectively (e.g. to existing records), you could usefully ‘tidy up’ Recorder names in MapMate that you have previously created (but sadly not those that others have synched to you).

[Jim McIntosh](#), Scottish Officer

Installing MapMate on a new computer

One of the questions we get asked quite regularly is what to do when you have bought a new computer and want to install MapMate. MapMate currently seems to be working fine on Windows 10 (if anyone is still having problems with Analysis in Windows 10 please let me know as we believe we have a fix for it). However, knowing how to install MapMate is not always intuitive. If you have an old CD you were issued many years ago it is not a good idea to try using this. An up-to-date installation file can be downloaded <http://www.mapmate.co.uk/alex/> which includes most of the instructions required. You need to make a clean new installation of MapMate on the new computer, you can then enter your cuk and reference number (which are printed on your original old CD) and

then you can transfer your files across. Incidentally, I have recently heard a couple of people mention paying for MapMate. The BSBI has a group licence for MapMate, which I believe should cover all vice-county recorders who use MapMate – and anyone else who uses MapMate to send a significant number of records to their local recorder. You should not therefore need to pay the annual subscription, and if you do this at present please email your country officer or [Bob Ellis](#) to ask to be added to the group licence.

[Polly Spencer-Vellacott](#), BSBI Welsh Officer

How do records get to the DDb that I do not know about?

Sometimes vice-county recorders are surprised to find recent records on the Database (DDb) that have not come via their usual route (whether MapMate or something else). There are various reasons that this can happen, but the most common is when a dataset including records from multiple counties is uploaded – for example a referee’s database of a particular taxon, or a regional/national survey that is thought to be of good quality. There are various ways a vice-county recorder can find out about these records. Unfortunately the automatic alert system is not necessarily working properly. In the meantime, you can do a search (for all dates or just recent) for records not from your own dataset.

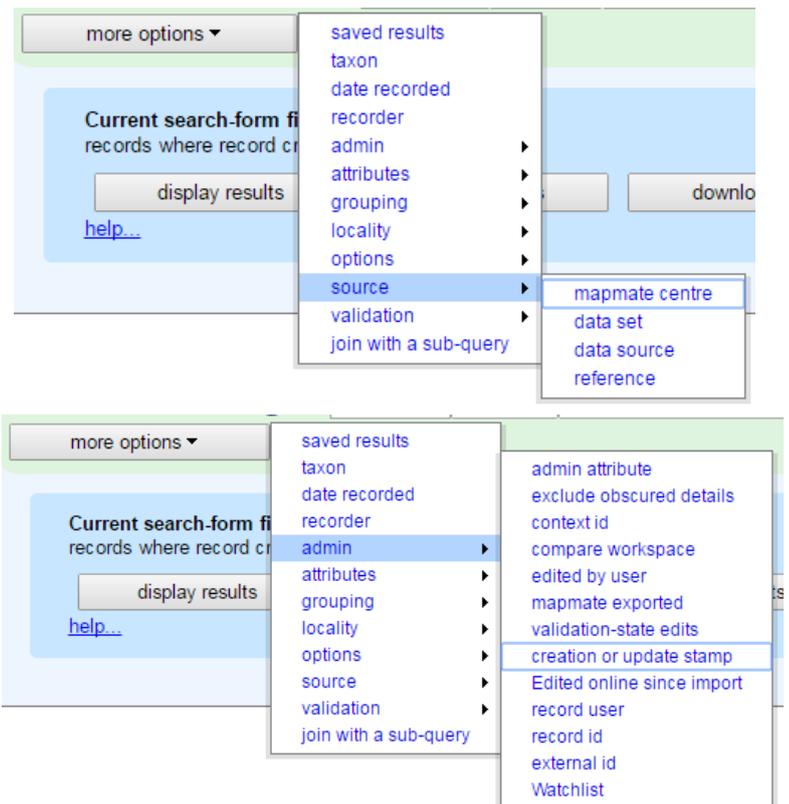
Use the more options button to select a source – you can use “mapmate centre” (then enter cuk), “data set” (enter the name of a dataset if you know one) or “data source” (e.g. Mapmate). If you select your own dataset, you can then tick “exclude” to search for other records.

You might also want to use the “creation or update stamp”; to view records created on the DDb since a certain date – this would help you to search for new records.

An example search is [available here](#) (you will need to be logged into the DDb and to change the county/ region to your own). You could also “group by” dataset to see what datasets are involved.

In some cases these records will be of critical taxa – e.g. *Taraxacum*, in which case the responsibility for validating them lies with the referee. However, if they are records of “ordinary” taxa, the vice-county recorder should feel free to validate them in the normal way (guidance is given/ linked in the February *eNews*).

[Polly Spencer-Vellacott](#), BSBI Welsh Officer



Seasonal recording

Are you still waiting for spring to start recording? How many early spring flowers are under-recorded because botanists are still hibernating? Now is the time to update your snowdrop and daffodil records where they are growing wild, and if you are [in the right part of the country](#), what about *Gagea lutea* (Yellow Star-of-Bethlehem)? There is some useful information on identifying different snowdrops and daffodils from Mick Crawley at bsbi.org/identification.

[Polly Spencer-Vellacott](#), BSBI Welsh Officer

The provision of BSBI records to the NBN Gateway and NBN Atlas UK

Some of you will probably be aware that the NBN Gateway (NBNG) is to be replaced by a NBN Atlas UK on the 1st April 2017 (the NBN Atlas Scotland, which forms part of this, has been up and running since 2016). This new website will differ in that it will provide access to records without restrictions. What this means in simple terms is “what you see is what you get” i.e. all records will be free to download for non-commercial use. Data-providers, such as the BSBI, are being encouraged, wherever possible, to upload all their records to the NBN Atlas UK at “capture resolution” (i.e. at the resolution they were made) rather than to blur their records to coarser scales (e.g. monad, tetrad, hectad). This has been driven by the government’s desire to increase access to publicly funded datasets, launched by the then Environment Secretary, Liz Truss, in 2015 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/open-environment-speech-by-elizabeth-truss>). If successful, this approach will revolutionise access to biological records for research, conservation, development and land management purposes.

The BSBI fully supports this more open approach to data, provided that it can remain financially viable, and that restrictions can be imposed for sensitive species or sites. BSBI has already made all of its Scottish records publicly available on the NBN Atlas Scotland (all records up to and including 2012 will be available from 1st April 2017). We made this decision because our Scottish VCRs, almost without exception, support open access **and** because Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) provide funding to enable us to support our network of volunteers.

We have made the difficult decision not transfer any English records to the NBN Atlas UK for the time being. This is due to a lack of funding despite the fact that the BSBI incurs significant costs in supporting its recording network in England as well as collating, verifying and making records available to others. We are currently in discussions with Natural England and other potential funders in an attempt to resolve this impasse and we are confident that, given sufficient funding, we will be able to make all our English records available, free of charge, in the not too distant future. We are aware that some VCRs have genuine concerns about increasing access to their data, from comments expressed three years ago, but the overall position has changed, and so we will circulate you afresh with clear alternatives before anything happens. Obviously, we will take into account the wishes of VCRs before entering into any new arrangement.

For Wales, we have transferred all the existing NBNG data to the NBN Atlas UK (pre-2000 records at 10 km resolution) and we hope to start discussions with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) soon to see how we can increase access to Welsh data in due course. Similarly, we hope to have discussions

with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) to see how we can improve access to data in Northern Ireland. As in England, the wishes of VCRs will be taken into account before BSBI enters in to any arrangement with the NBN.

Records for the Republic of Ireland will not be transferred as this is outside the scope of the NBN Atlases, which will only cover the UK. The small number of records that are on the NBNG will be removed by the end of March.

We know that some VCRs have felt “left in the dark” with regard to our plans for increasing access to their data but the truth is that the development of the NBNG and new atlases has been so fluid that each time we wanted to report our plans the position had changed. We are optimistic that our position in England and Wales will change over the coming months. In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to get in touch.

[Kevin Walker](#), BSBI Head of Science

Submitting and verifying plant records using iRecord

iRecord is an online application for managing and sharing biological records. The system is being actively developed by the Centre for Ecology of Hydrology (CEH), and is increasingly being used by wildlife recorders as their primary means of inputting, storing, managing, and sharing their observations. iRecord also provides a system for experts to verify records submitted by others. A smartphone application was launched in 2016 and is rapidly growing in popularity for recorders to capture wildlife sightings in the field.

How many plant records are there and where do they come from?

Currently there are around 700,000 vascular plant records held within iRecord, and associated surveys that use the same underlying database system (collectively held within an “Indicia data warehouse”). Most of these are ad hoc records, but records from a range of other organisations and monitoring schemes are captured by the same system and shared with iRecord. Schemes currently contributing large numbers of plant records include RISC (Recording Invasive Species Counts), a public engagement project that aims to capture sightings of around 20 invasive non-native plant speciesⁱ, and the National Plant Monitoring Scheme, run by BSBI, CEH and Plantlife and launched in 2015. In addition, records collected using the BSBI’s New Year Plant Hunt smartphone app in 2017 were also captured within the Indicia data warehouse linked to iRecord.

Are the records verified and if so by whom?

All records submitted via iRecord are automatically checked (“auto-validated”) against a series of “rule-sets” defined by the BSBI and including a check against the known range of a species (based on BSBI distribution data). Additionally, records can be verified “manually” by authorised users including VCRs, botanists who have been authorised by VCRs to check records for his or her VC and national experts who check records from their area of expertise (e.g. non-native invasives). The verification system is very flexible and allows the verifier to flag, query or comment on a record. Many recorders also submit photos to aid with this verification process. Currently all verification occurs within iRecord but we plan to extend this to records imported from iRecord into the BSBI’s own Distribution Database (see below).

What happens to records that are currently held within the iRecord warehouse?

National Schemes such as BSBI are responsible for establishing the flow of records from iRecord to support research and conservation. All plant records from iRecord (and associated Indicia surveys) will therefore be made available to the BSBI's Distribution Database in early 2017. These records will initially be partitioned separately from the BSBI's main data set, accessible to VCRs to review, verify or download, but not treated automatically as part of the BSBI Database. VCRs will be able to select which parts of iRecord/Indicia they wish to assimilate into the BSBI's database. There will be two-way exchange of verification annotations between iRecord and the BSBI database, so verification work can be done in either or both systems as the user verifier prefers. All verifiedⁱⁱ plant records held within the iRecord/Indicia system will also be forwarded on to the NBN Gateway (and its successors) so that they are publicly available for use by others. The dataset will be affiliated to BSBI and CEH.

How can I submit my records via iRecord?

It is very easy to submit plant records via iRecord. These can be entered online via the website (<http://www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/>) or smartphone app (<http://irecord.org.uk/app>). Note that you have to register with iRecord to use the smartphone app and records submitted by the app can only currently be edited online. CEH are working on improvements to the iRecord App for plant recorders, and also developing a tailored "plant recording card" designed specifically for the efficient entry of records recorded in monads or tetrads to support atlas recording. This will be available for testing in late 2017.

I'm not a VCR or referee. Can I become an "authorised verifier" on iRecord?

If you would like to become an authorised verifier for a particular area or region then please contact your local VCR first to check that they are happy for you to verify records on their behalf. If you are interested in verifying a specific species or group of species then please contact us and we will check with the relevant national referee.

I'm a VCR or referee. Do I have to verify records on iRecord?

There is no expectation that VCRs or referees will verify records on iRecord or after records are imported into the DDb, although we hope that this role can be delegated to "trusted" verifiers for specific areas or species groups. For those that do, however, the benefits will include access to an increasing body of records which we are sure will contain new and interesting records. More generally it will help to improve the quality of plant records available to others and raise the profile of the BSBI as the key organisation involved in plant recording in Britain and Ireland.

ⁱ *Aceana* sp., *Ailanthus altissimus*, *Azolla filiculoides*, *Carpobrotus edulis*, *Cortaderia* sp., *Crassula helmsii*, *Fallopia japonica*, *Gunnera* sp., *Heracleum mantegazzianum*, *Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*, *Impatiens capensis*, *I. glandulifera*, *Lagarosiphon major*, *Lysichiton americanus*, *Ludwigia* sp., *Mimulus* sp., *Prunus laurocerasus*, *Rhododendron ponticum*.

ⁱⁱ Verified records will include those that have been checked manually by BSBI referees/recorders as well as those that have been "auto-validated" using rule-sets developed using BSBI distribution data. The validation/verification status of each record will be "flagged" so that users accessing the records via the NBN Gateway are aware as to the level of checking that has taken place.

[Kevin Walker](#), BSBI Head of Science
[Tom Humphrey](#), BSBI Database Officer
David Roy, CEH

BSBI Science & Research Committee: grants for 2017

The BSBI, through its Science and Research Committee, runs a small grants scheme to support research to enhance knowledge of the flora of Britain and Ireland. Applications are now being taken for 2017 and will remain open until 31st March. Approximately eight grants per year will be awarded, typically around £500 each but up to a maximum of £1000.

Applications are invited from PhD students, academic researchers and amateur botanists working on research; applicants need not be members of the BSBI. Each project should have a scientific remit – i.e. an attempt to find out something by conducting research. Pure data gathering projects are not encouraged.

The scientific remit of the scheme includes: taxonomy, systematics and evolution; ecology, including autecological, physiological and phenological studies; population and ecological genetics; phytogeography/phylogeography; plant/animal interactions, including plant biochemistry; and conservation biology.

Activities eligible for funding include: travel and subsistence for field-work, visits to herbaria, botanic gardens and other scientific institutions; specimen preparation; scientific equipment, consumables and laboratory services; purchase of hardware and software for data handling; publication costs (preparing camera-ready copy, preparation of illustrations, printing).

Successful applicants would be expected to provide BSBI with their raw data and would be invited to share the results of their research at the BSBI's [Annual Exhibition Meeting](#) and on the website, and we would expect to see some sort of publication as the outcome of any grant awarded, even if it is just a report in BSBI News. It can take several years to get to this stage, however, so we do not make this a condition of awarding the grant.

Applications should be submitted to [Louise Marsh](#) by 31st March 2017 and will then be collated and passed on to members of the Science and Research Committee for consideration. Awards will be announced within 10 weeks of the closing date and successful applicants notified by email. All grants must be claimed in full within one year. The application form can be downloaded from the [Training page](#).

[Louise Marsh](#), BSBI Communications Officer
[Kevin Walker](#), BSBI Head of Science

BSBI VC webpages

Many thanks to all the County Recorders who have recently sent updates for their county webpages. New webpages have also gone live for [East Lothian](#), [Norfolk](#), [Nottinghamshire](#), [East](#) and [West Donegal](#) and [Pembrokeshire](#), with several others in the pipeline. Links to all the new pages can be found on the Local Botany page [here](#) and will soon also be linked from the map on the homepage. The addition of the new Pembrokeshire page means that all the counties of [Wales](#) now have a dedicated webpage. Some webpages are more detailed than others, with county descriptions, links to [Rare Plant Registers](#), local meetings programmes, county Facebook pages and county newsletters, contact details for the County Recorder(s), and a whole range of other resources. They are

remarkably easy to set up: just [send me](#) a couple of nice photographs (perhaps a landscape view, some botanists in action or a close-up of a special local plant) and a little text. More detail can be added later - we are aiming to keep the website looking dynamic (and full of useful information) with regular updates to different pages. Updates to county webpages in Wales can also be sent direct to the [Welsh Officer](#) for uploading.

[Louise Marsh](#), BSBI Communications Officer

Rare Plant Registers

The first batch of [Rare Plant Registers](#) (RPRs) to be published in 2017 includes updates to [Kent](#), [Nottinghamshire](#) and [Montgomeryshire](#). The Montgomeryshire RPR, for example, was first published in 2009 and has been updated electronically on an annual basis. However, this year's update has now been prepared as a 4MB pdf which can be downloaded from the Montgomeryshire vice-county webpage and even printed if you so wish (though it does run to just over 200 pages). Files larger than 8MB have to be split up into more manageable chunks – see the [Kent](#) page for an example of how this works – or uploaded to a cloud storage facility (e.g. Dropbox or Google Drive) and a link shared on the county webpage – see the [East Sutherland](#) page for an example.

[Louise Marsh](#), BSBI Communications Officer

Sad news

We are sorry to pass on the very sad news that Eric Meek died on 14th February after a short illness. A [notice to this effect](#) was posted on the BSBI News & Views blog and shared via social media, allowing botanists and members of the birding community to express their sympathy and share stories of how Eric had helped them over the years.

BSBI News & Views

On the BSBI News & Views pages in February: as well as the [notice about Eric Meek](#), the charity Caring for God's Acre tell us about their '[Beautiful Burial Ground Project](#)'; Martin Godfrey [reports on a visit by Litchfield Botanical Society](#) to his local herbarium; in this month's [guest post by a BSBI Training Grant recipient](#), Vanessa Reeves tells us about the Botany for Beginners course she attended; there is a note about the [new BSBI Handbook for Violas](#) and how to benefit from the pre-publication offer; and we report on a paper published in the latest issue of *New Journal of Botany* which suggests that bad weather on the Isle of Man is responsible for [Elm trees avoiding infection by Dutch elm disease](#).

[Louise Marsh](#), BSBI Communications Officer

And finally...

We have received this request from a researcher at BBC Gardeners' World: "I am working on a series of films about non-native plants species, their history, impact, control and how they may affect the gardens of our viewers. Some examples of the species we are interested in are *Lysichiton americanus*, *Heracleum mantegazzium*, *Carpobrotus edulis* and *Rhododendron ponticum*, with the potential of doing some work on invasive insects and fungi too. But, we're open to anything at this stage. Do you know of any exciting projects that we could get involved with filming? The stories would have to have a direct benefit or link to our viewers, e.g. highlight legislation, be educational... any thoughts would be gratefully received!" This could be a good opportunity to get some clear info on invasive species across to millions of gardeners, so if you have any suggestions, please let me know and I will pass them on.

[Louise Marsh](#), BSBI Communications Officer

BSBI eNews

The current and recent back issues of BSBI *eNews* are available on the [Publications page](#) of the BSBI website. An email with a link to BSBI *eNews* is circulated to BSBI Recorders, Referees, staff and committee members. Please feel free to forward it to anyone (including non-members) who you think might be interested.

Jim welcomes short contributions from anyone on topics of interest and relevance to fellow readers. BSBI *eNews* is generally published on the 1st of each month so contributions should ideally reach him by the 21st of the preceding month. We'd also be pleased to have feedback on any of the articles appearing in BSBI *eNews*.

[Polly Spencer-Vellacott](#), BSBI Welsh Officer